

SUICIDE PREVENTION NETWORK News Bulletin

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TEEN LINE: Community Policing and Teen Suicide Prevention

submitted by Elaine Leader, Ph.D., CGP., FAGPA

Teen suicide in the U.S. has quadrupled since 1950. Every 90 minutes one teenager dies by suicide and every 78 seconds another makes an attempt. A national study of nearly 12,000 high school students in 2000 by the Centers for Disease Control revealed that

3.6 million youth nationwide considered suicide

2.1 million devised a plan, and

1 million made an attempt

These youth came from every socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic background. Adolescents who are considered particularly high risk for suicide include gay and lesbian youth, HIV positive teens, chemically dependent youth, and runaways/throwaways, particularly those who have been physical-

ly and sexually abused. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth 15-24 years of age. Most disturbing of all, the national suicide rate among 10-14 year olds increased 120% since 1980 – the biggest jump of any age group. (*National Network for Youth; Center for Disease Control*



and Prevention)

In 1996, in addition to our ongoing Teen Suicide Prevention Outreaches to schools and youth groups, TEEN

LINE, the Los Angeles-based teen-to-teen hotline affiliated with Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, inaugurated a community policing alliance with local law enforcement to prevent teen suicide. The goal of TEEN LINE's Los Angeles Police Department Teen Suicide Training Project was to improve police handling of teen suicide victims and their families, and to sensitize police officers to the needs of suicidal adolescents. This was to be accomplished by the development of a training approach that incorporated didactic, audio visual and experiential components. A key element was the utilization of suicide survivors as panelists who relate their personal experience of suicide, thus putting a face to teen suicide. The

distribution of materials including TEEN LINE's *Youth Yellow Pages*, a resource handbook for youth, and educational brochures on teen suicide prevention, as well as a brochure from Compassionate Friends is part of the educational effort.

TEEN LINE's first efforts involved instructing officers who attend the Los Angeles Police Department's Juvenile Procedures School and this continues to be a mainstay of our community policing teen suicide prevention project. The Juvenile Procedures School is mandatory continuing education for juvenile officers within the LAPD. Officers attend four days of seminars, all of which, except two, are taught by law enforcement. (continued page 2)

Every child has a story to tell submitted by Michael Pines

In 2000 and 2001 the Child Death Review Team of the Inter-Agency Council of Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) established the nation's first dedicated multi-disciplinary Child and Adolescent Suicide Review Team (CASRT). The strategic partnership is invested in suicide prevention by listening carefully to every case of children and youth that have died by suicide. Team members represent the coroner, law enforcement, schools, mental health, substance abuse, child protective services, health services, probation, housing services, colleges and universities. Together, they strive to understand and develop systemic solutions to address the best practices in suicide prevention. Members tasked with this duty also develop methods to tune up the volume by improving our opportunities to gather more accurate and diverse sources of information about these cases.

In a groundbreaking undertaking to fulfill further understanding of youth suicides, the CASRT received funding from Jeffrey Gutin foundation of Young Adults at the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to enable us to improve the quantity and qual-

ity of information gathered by coroners and medical examiners when they investigate these cases in the field. In August 2011, the CASRT established a partnership with the Medical Examiners and Coroner Investigators at the Los Angeles County Department of Coroner to standardize field investigation procedures and increase the collection of valuable health prevention information. The Department of Coroner has primary authority at the scene in all suicide cases, and, therefore, coroner investigators have unique opportunity to provide valuable suicide prevention information. Their jurisdiction over these cases provides a unique vantage point to collect and document information from all responders. Using procedural guidelines developed in partnership with investigators and suicide prevention experts, tools were produced enabling investigators to gather more youth-related information during their case investigation. This information is then studied and discussed by the CASRT team in efforts to conduct a more comprehensive study of prevention,

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2nd Annual Suicide Prevention Summit

Two Lives a Day Lost in Los Angeles: Communicating about Suicide and Mental Health



Held on Monday, September 10th at the California Endowment Center, Los Angeles County public information officers, mental health and school leaders and the media were invited to the summit. At the event, attendees learned how to responsibly report about suicide and mental health through best practices, participated in interactive workshops, and listened to how journalists covered suicide and mental health stories for their broadcasts.

This year's event was presented by LACDMH, LACOE and the Entertainment Industries Council, with support from the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63), administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA).

(cont'd -Teen Line)

ment personnel. The School is offered eight times a year, with each class consisting of between 25-40 experienced officers.

In addition to participation as Instructors at the LAPD Juvenile Procedures School, the Team has developed customized, specialized training to meet the specific needs of varied law enforcement settings, ranging from Police Explorers, to D.A.R.E officers to SWAT team members, the Los Angeles Unified School

District Police Officers, the California Hostage Negotiators, the Sheriff's Department, and other local Police Departments.

The goal of the training is to assist the officers' handling of teen suicide incidents by sensitizing them to the needs of suicidal youth and their families. At the same time, we acknowledge the difficulty of the assignment they face when dealing with troubled youth and their families. We have found that it is very important that we show concern for their

task and the challenge this entails if we want to effect attitudinal change.

The emphasis of the training format is in sharing of experiences. The panelists' sharing of the painful past experiences they endured, and the description of their healing journeys, is the heart of the educational process. Likewise, when the officers share their own past and current experiences with teen suicidal behavior, on both a personal and professional level, an additional dimension of understanding

occurs.

Despite the difficult material encountered in discussing teen suicide, the TEEN LINE Team has been inspiring and inspired by the contacts made through its community policing alliance. Our research documents that our training model is an effective tool for teen suicide prevention within the context of a community policing effort. We hope other communities will follow our example – to the benefit of all involved – youth, officers, and the community at large.

(cont'd from front page - Every child has a story to tell)

intervention, and postvention practices.

A working draft of the investigation guidelines was created introduced to coroner investigators at a training meeting held in December 2011. Modifications to the guidelines were made and the modified guidelines were implemented in January 1, 2012 for a six-month field-testing period. Information collected by coroner investigators was then incorporated into CASRT's monthly follow back case studies of child and adolescent suicide beginning May 2012.

While the information of individual cases is confidential, aggregated findings are published annually in the Los Angeles County ICAN Child Death Review Team Report. These findings are submitted to The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and the department heads of agencies that provide services to children and adolescents. The CASRT continues its efforts to improve quality suicide prevention information and it hopes to impact on investigation and suicide prevention study back practices nationwide. To view evaluation findings, see: http://www.icanhttp://ican4kids.org/issues_CASRT.asp4kids.org/.

National, State and Local News & Events

New National Strategy for Suicide Prevention by the Surgeon General

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/national-strategy-suicide-prevention/index.html>

The following is an approximate timeline to submit information or articles for the upcoming issue.

December 2012 November 30

What would you like to see in future issues of **SPN News**? Help us tailor **SPN News** to fit your needs. E-mail your suggestions or requests to roruiz@dmh.la county.gov and we'll see what we can do!